



## **Trafficking in Persons Report (Cuba)**

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### **CUBA (TIER 3)**

Cuba is a country of internal trafficking for sexual exploitation and forced labor. Child sexual victims are generally teenage girls aged 14 to 17 who are abused in prostitution. The Cuban Government does not condone underage prostitution, but does not publicly address the problem, which largely takes place in the context of tourism that earns hard currency for the state. Cuba is a destination for sex tourists, including foreigners searching for underage prostitutes. Cuba's tourist industry is heavily dominated by state companies, and government employees tolerate corrupt practices that facilitate this sexual exploitation, sometimes even making state-run facilities available for underage prostitution. Traffickers and prostitutes often arrange room rentals in private homes for their illegal activities. Most traffickers work in small, informal networks, luring teenagers into the sex trade with promises of fast money and consumer goods. Cuban forced labor victims include children coerced to work in commercial agriculture. Some opponents of the Cuban Government, often arrested under vague charges such as "dangerousness" and "contempt of authority," are forced to carry out work that profits the state.

The Government of Cuba does not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and is not making significant efforts to do so. Cuban officials dismiss as politically motivated any criticisms of the government's failure to address trafficking. They have avoided developing a strategy to address the problem. The government needs to publicly acknowledge that trafficking occurs, implement a national plan to prevent teenagers from entering the sex trade, and end its forced labor practices.

#### ***Prosecution***

The government has no anti-trafficking law enforcement policy and there was no observed progress in punishing traffickers during the last year. The government instituted a broad crackdown against prostitution and related activities during 2003, including shutting down private home room rentals that reportedly contributed to the problem of child prostitution. Officials did not provide information on the effectiveness of these efforts. Existing statutes allow for the prosecution of sex trafficking offenses, but the government refuses to release any data on the few prosecutions that it reportedly conducts. Bilateral police cooperation has taken place on specific sex trafficking investigations, but as a matter of policy Cuban authorities do not admit to the existence of a problem. At least four U.S. citizens were arrested and have been convicted in Cuba on charges of "corruption of minors." Cuban authorities contributed evidence that led to the conviction of a major child pornographer in the U.S. and the dismantling of a pornography ring in Cuba, which involved commercially sexually exploited children.

#### ***Protection***

The government does not provide protection services to trafficking victims and there has been no progress in this area during 2003. Child victims of the sex trade are generally treated as criminals. Suspected prostitutes, including children, are often detained in police sweeps, held for several hours or days, fined, and released. The government describes its use of forced child labor as a "voluntary" arrangement and does not acknowledge that it constitutes trafficking.

#### ***Prevention***

The government undertakes no information campaign to prevent trafficking for sexual

exploitation, although it admits that prostitution is a problem. The government fails to publicize the incidence and dangers of child prostitution.